CLAIMS

We claim:

1. An instant message (IM) communication method comprising the steps of:

inserting in an IM a voice communications identifier;

transmitting said IM to a recipient; and,

responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a voice communications link with said recipient.

2. The IM communication method of claim 1, wherein said inserting step further comprises the step of inserting in said IM a selectable symbol denoting voice communications availability.

3. The IM communication method of claim 1, wherein said inserting step further comprises the step of:

inserting in said IM a reference to a sender of said IM; and,

embedding computer program code in said IM, wherein said computer program code is configured to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

4. The IM communication method of claim 3, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

5. The IM communication method of claim 3, wherein said establishing step comprises the steps of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, determining a link address for said sender based on said reference, and executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender according to said determined link address.

6. The IM communication method of claim 5, wherein said link address is a telephone number.

7. The IM communication method of claim 5, wherein said link address is an IP address.

8. The IM communication method of claim 1, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a Voice over IP (VoIP) based voice communications link with said recipient.

9. The IM communication method of claim 1, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a telephony-based voice communications link with said recipient over a public switched telephone network (PSTN).

10. An instant message (IM) communication method comprising the steps of:

detecting a voice communications identifier in an IM transmitted by a sender;

responsive to detecting said voice communications identifier, displaying a selectable icon; and,

responsive to a selection of said icon, establishing a voice communications link with said sender.

11. The IM communication method of claim 10, wherein said establishing step comprises the steps of:

extracting from said IM embedded computer program code configured to establish a voice communications link with said sender; and,

responsive to said selection of said icon, executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

12. The IM communication method of claim 11, further comprising the step of extracting an embedded reference to said sender from said IM.

13. The IM communication method of claim 12, wherein said executing step further comprises the steps of:

determining a link address for said sender based on said extracted reference; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender according to said determined link address.

14. The IM communication method of claim 13, wherein said link address is a telephone number.

15. The IM communication method of claim 13, wherein said link address is an IP address.

16. The IM communication method of claim 10, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a Voice over IP (VoIP) based voice communications link with said recipient.

17. The IM communication method of claim 10, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a telephony-based voice communications link with said recipient over a public switched telephone network (PSTN).

18. The IM communications method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

extracting from said IM embedded references to said sender and at least one other recipient of said IM; and,

displaying a corresponding selectable icon for each of said at least one other recipients.

19. The IM communication method of claim 18, further comprising the steps of:

responsive to a selection of one of said selectable icons, identifying a corresponding recipient and determining a link address for said corresponding recipient based on said extracted reference; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said corresponding recipient according to said determined link address.

20. The IM communication method of claim 18, further comprising the steps of:

responsive to a selection of two or more of said selectable icons, identifying a corresponding recipient for each selected icon and determining a link address for said corresponding recipients based on said extracted references; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a conference call with said corresponding recipients according to said determined link addresses.

21. A machine readable storage having stored thereon a computer program having a plurality of code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:

inserting in an instant message (IM) a voice communications identifier;

transmitting said IM to a recipient; and,

responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a voice communications link with said recipient.

22. The machine readable storage of claim 21, wherein said inserting step further comprises the step of inserting in said IM a selectable symbol denoting voice communications availability.

23. The machine readable storage of claim 21, wherein said inserting step further comprises the step of:

inserting in said IM a reference to a sender of said IM; and,

embedding computer program code in said IM, wherein said computer program code is configured to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

24. The machine readable storage of claim 23, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

25. The machine readable storage of claim 23, wherein said establishing step comprises the steps of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, determining a link address for said sender based on said reference, and executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender according to said determined link address.

26. The machine readable storage of claim 25, wherein said link address is a telephone number.

27. The machine readable storage of claim 25, wherein said link address is an IP address.

28. The machine readable storage of claim 21, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a Voice over IP (VoIP) based voice communications link with said recipient.

29. The machine readable storage of claim 21, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a telephony-based voice communications link with said recipient over a public switched telephone network (PSTN).

30. A machine readable storage having stored thereon a computer program having a plurality of code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:

detecting a voice communications identifier in an instant message (IM) transmitted by a sender;

responsive to detecting said voice communications identifier, displaying a selectable icon; and,

responsive to a selection of said icon, establishing a voice communications link with said sender.

31. The machine readable storage of claim 30, wherein said establishing step comprises the steps of:

extracting from said IM embedded computer program code configured to establish a voice communications link with said sender; and,

responsive to said selection of said icon, executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender.

32. The machine readable storage of claim 31, further comprising the step of extracting an embedded reference to said sender from said IM.

33. The machine readable storage of claim 32, wherein said executing step further comprises the steps of:

determining a link address for said sender based on said extracted reference; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said sender according to said determined link address.

34. The machine readable storage of claim 33, wherein said link address is a telephone number.

35. The machine readable storage of claim 33, wherein said link address is an IP address.

36. The machine readable storage of claim 30, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a Voice over IP (VoIP) based voice communications link with said recipient.

37. The machine readable storage of claim 30, wherein said establishing step comprises the step of responsive to said recipient selecting said voice communications identifier, establishing a telephony-based voice communications link with said recipient over a public switched telephone network (PSTN).

38. The machine readable storage of claim 31, further comprising the steps of:

extracting from said IM embedded references to said sender and at least one other recipient of said IM; and,

displaying a corresponding selectable icon for each of said at least one other recipients.

39. The machine readable storage of claim 38, further comprising the steps of:

responsive to a selection of one of said selectable icons, identifying a corresponding recipient and determining a link address for said corresponding recipient based on said extracted reference; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a voice communications link with said corresponding recipient according to said determined link address.

40. The machine readable storage of claim 38, further comprising the steps of:

responsive to a selection of two or more of said selectable icons, identifying a corresponding recipient for each selected icon and determining a link address for said corresponding recipients based on said extracted references; and,

executing said embedded computer program code in order to establish a conference call with said corresponding recipients according to said determined link addresses.

41. An instant message (IM) article of manufacture for use between IM/Chat session clients in a computer communications network comprising:

a header component encapsulating a reference to at least one of a sending node in the network and a recipient node in the network;

a text component encapsulating message text which can be extracted from the IM and displayed in an IM/Chat session client; and,

an executable voice communications link program component configured to establish a voice communications link between said sending and recipient nodes.

42. The IM article of manufacture of claim 41, wherein said voice communications link is a Voice over IP (VoIP) based communications link.

43. The IM article of manufacture of claim 42, wherein said voice communications link is a telephony-based link

44. An instant message (IM)/Chat session client comprising:

a conventional IM processor, said conventional IM processor extracting and displaying message text encapsulated in a received IM; and,

a voice conversation processor, said voice conversation processor identifying a voice communications link identifier encapsulated in said received IM, displaying a selectable icon in response to detecting said voice communications link identifier and,

responsive to a selection of said selectable icon, establishing a voice communications link with a sender of said received IM.